

“DATSIMA” – Reflections of Excellence –

by Ed Snyder / Ed Snyder Outdoors

(Jan. 04, 2007 - Lake Amistad- Del Rio, Texas)... Slowly throttling past the high walled dam to view the grandeur of the double eagles of the Puente International border crossing for Estados Unidos, Mexicanos and The United States of America, one among us noticed the reverse lettering spelling out DATSIMA, which became a mirrored image of the aquatic treasure we had just spent four wonderful days fishing on, a perfect finale for experiences gathered from “The Big Friendly”.

An ‘On the Border’ phenomenon, Lake Amistad is much like a peanut butter & jelly sandwich when considering the unique and distinct flavors enhancing this 70,000 surface acre Rio Grande impoundment sandwiched between its colorful shore bound border dwellings of Del Rio Texas, and Mexico’s Ciudad Acuna.

Kept mostly as a bass fishing secret among knowing anglers for these past 20 odd years, information about Amistad’s *microperterus salmoide* fishery began leaking out when the national bass tournament circuits started publicizing its tremendous bass fishing possibilities to the national press and outdoor newsprint journals.

“We got discovered,” chuckled Woman’s Bassmaster Tour pro/circuit angler, Debra Hengst, a seasoned bass angler and avid pro/bass tournament competitor from San Antonio, TX, “I mean, one day we were zipping right through Del Rio to get to the lake, and the next we were getting stuck in rush hour traffic!”

Invited to join Debra Hengst on a fishing trip to Lake Amistad, my acceptance found me becoming an early morning ‘drive-by’ victim when Debra snatched me out of Choke Canyon’s Callaham State Park & Wildlife Preserve from chasing wildlife of one sort to chasing that of another as we headed west to Del Rio, TX.

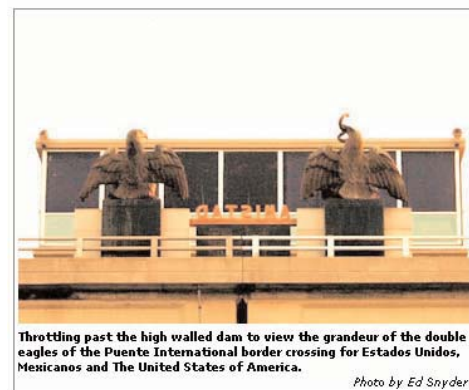
Our three hour drive entertained us with rambling vistas of cacti, mesquite, and the buck-brush of West Texas scrub with its sprawling hunting ranches reaching beyond endless horizons. Trailering “Boo” (Deb’s Skeeter bass rig) through the crossroad settlements of Devine, Hondo, Uvalde, and Brackettville (John Wayne’s “Alamo”), we finally rolled into Del Rio at high-noon, where we wasted little time checking in before heading out to experience the legendary Lake Amistad and its incredible ‘on the border’ bass fishery.

Armed with both Texas and Mexico fishing licenses, Diablo East hosted our launch area for my first emersion into this ‘gin-clear’ lake fed by the Pecos, Devils, and Rio Grande Rivers. With Debra pointing her Skeeter bass-rig up San Pedro Canyon, this became my very first time fishing Lake Amistad, but I wasn’t the only virgin angler along for this trip as Denese Freeman, of Lawton, Oklahoma, was also aboard to experience some learning curves. Denese, an internet web-master, and WBT co/angler, jetted in to pre-fish with Debra for an upcoming Women’s Bassmaster Tour event to be held here on February 8-10, 2007.

Skimming across Amistad waters my former perception of clear-water lakes was simply shattered upon viewing the impressive clarity of Amistad that revealed treetops in 50-feet of water, or deeper with such transparency that the trees, brush, and boulders zipping past us seemed but a few feet deep rather than the extreme depths being recorded by Debra’s Lowrance. I MEAN, at some point I would be throwing spinner baits at visible subsurface structure only to be informed by Debra that I was trying to slow-roll a tree or boulder in 50 feet of water AMAZING!



Debra Hengst holds up a hefty DATSIMA bass released after marking the area for tournament possibilities
Photo by Ed Snyder



Throttling past the high walled dam to view the grandeur of the double eagles of the Puente International border crossing for Estados Unidos, Mexicanos and The United States of America.
Photo by Ed Snyder

"Amistad stands for 'Big Friendly' Debra answered my curiosity before explaining the reasons why she and Denese were fishing. Our WBT tournament dead-water period starts on January 18th, which will prohibit us from fishing these waters until the official WBT tournament practice period before the event. So if we are going to familiarize ourselves with Amistad's subsurface and bass holding structure to develop any bass fishing knowledge we have to do it before the dead-water time."

"A lot of our bass fishing situations really depends on weather patterns, Debra informed, where the warm and foggy weather conditions we're experiencing here now in December, will put the bass on different patterns than from the cold and windy weather situations normally experienced in February. So our info gathering on this trip will mainly have us focused on gaining some knowledge as to where the bass will be holding. "Eliminating water" is what we call it, Debra stated, as we'll be trying to figure out what water to fish and what water to avoid at tournament time. This is why I'm not so concerned with putting together any bass fishing patterns now, Debra reasoned, as by tournament time any bass feeding patterns put together now will most certainly have changed.

"Depending on weather conditions I expect the bass will be on pre-spawn patterns in February so I'm mainly just looking for areas where they'll be holding during that pre-spawn period, such as flats near deepwater drop-offs. Our water temp on Amistad now in December is 60 to 62 degrees with heavy fog and light south winds, but by tournament time in February the weather and water temps may be 10 to 20 degrees lower with chilly north winds and high pressure blue-bird skies."

"This is why I'm here with Debra right now, stated Denese Freeman, so she can help familiarize me with a lake that I've never been on before. I need to know the type of structure that we'll be fishing and what baits I'll need to fish them with. My impressions of Amistad are very positive, stated Denese, and I find the lake to be very beautiful, especially the clarity of the water being so unbelievably clear."

"I always try to tell people just how clear Amistad's water is, Debra chuckled, and you just don't know until you've actually experienced it for yourself. Denese was actually able to see all the different types of subsurface grasses and shrubbery such as Hydrilla, Huisache, Coontail and Mesquite trees below us as we motored out onto the lake. In fact, Debra chuckled; I had a hard time getting Denese to fish instead of spending most of her time staring into the water like it was an aquarium full of exotic fish.

(Writers note) – The amazing thing that immediately caught my eye upon entering the Del Rio business area was its BIZZY-NESS. On arriving at noon the commercial entities were busy trying to keep up with the traffic flow, which reminded me 'somewhat' of Houston's rush hour. Besides being an Air Force town, with a nearby Air Base providing a strong financial backbone for Del Rio businesses, the main-street area was really motor-vating with sportsmen from nearby hunting ranches, or anglers either trailering their fishing rigs from, or on their way to Lake Amistad. Visiting Winter Texans also crowded the byways cruising main street business districts in their sleek and shiny recreational vehicles, with Del Rio having no shortage of motel/hotels, cabins, or RV parks to house visiting guests.

Along with the tools of their trade, touring bass tournament anglers embrace the unique importance of Internet tools, such as personal web-sites or e-mail connections for giving them media access and public exposure, as well as to help attract financial interests from bass tournament sponsors who may want to put your name on their products.

"It's like having your own personal media service, Debra Hengst explained, which gives you the opportunity for posting your reports, articles, photos, or tournament info 'stuff' that you want the public or sponsors to view. And my fishing partner, Denese Freeman, provides me with one of the best media tools for posting all of my tournament info on."

"What I do, Denese informed, is to build web-sites to your specific personality and needs and then help to keep all of your information updated for those who wish to keep up with what you are doing. It's the next best thing to having your own TV, radio, or newsprint service all rolled up into one, Denese stated, and a good 'updated' internet web-site will really help to advance your bass tournament career."

Although our trip was mostly spent checking out the bassin' waters of Diablo, San Pedro, and Devils on the American side, with Del Burro, Rain God, and Amistad's Dam area attracting our Mexican interests, we did however enjoy hooking and landing some feisty largemouth bass within bordering waters. Amistad holds both Largemouth (Florida strain and native) and Smallmouth bass, with most bass anglers rating Amistad as being a "world class" fishery. Striped bass, crappie, catfish, and probably some of the largest bluegill that you'll ever

catch on a cricket, Debra pointed out, are also thriving in Amistad waters, with Tilapia, a prime bait fish for bass in Amistad, also holding high value as a tabled food fish. In fact, Debra added, Tilapia are given as one of the main reasons for the amazing success of Amistad at becoming a major bass fishery, which produced a 15.68 lb lake record bass caught on a DD-22 crank-bait by Tom Sutherland in December of 2005.

Homeward bound, Debra and Denese chatted about the value of their Amistad trip. "Our experiences gained from this trip far surpassed the expenses incurred, Denese theorized, with Debra in agreement, coming away with valuable personal knowledge of the launch areas that we'll be using for the tournament and advanced familiarity about the lake and what to search for. And that kind of information just doesn't come from reading about Amistad, Debra finalized, as you really have to spend time on the water to experience what "The Big Friendly" is all about.

Although tilapia is noted as a major factor for the prime bass fishery Amistad now enjoys, another item that inserted its importance in 1994, as Hydrilla, a noxious aquatic weed growth previously foreign to Amistad waters, quickly seeded in to provide a unique and extremely valuable fishing composition. Hydrilla beds provide cover for baitfish such as tilapia, which in turn attracts feeding bass, which in turn offers a prime fishing area for the bass anglers. Then, along with protective game fish rules and guidelines set by Texas Parks & Wildlife, and the National Parks Service, Amistad quickly began to develop into what is now considered a "World Class" bass fishery. Producing such quality bass for the anglers as to set record breaking tournament weigh-in tallies such as FLW's -2- day catch of 10 bass/56 lbs and a BASS Elite Series -4- day tally of 20 bass/104.8 lbs. Along with the major interests by the National Bass tournament circuits, bringing their \$\$\$ MEGA-BUCK \$\$\$ events to Amistad, the bass tournament organizations also bring in tremendous financial windfalls for Amistad, and its surrounding business communities. An important factor which has been well noticed by the Del Rio Chamber of Commerce.

"Del Rio has been tournament oriented for more than 20 years now, advised Del Rio Convention and Visitors Bureau Director, Donna Langford, but in the last six years we've really been blessed with visitations from some of the top bass tournament tours such as FLW and BASS. Last year we hosted the Bassmaster's prestigious Elite tour, which set all kinds of tournament weigh-in records topped off with California BASS/Pro Ishama Monroe's \$103,000 win for his 20 bass catch weighing 104.8 -lbs tallied up from his four days competitive fishing. An incredible bass fishing feat that was recorded by ESPN Outdoors and televised around the world."

"We've elevated our tournament tour visitations from the few dozen of 20 years ago to more than 190 tournaments scheduled for 2007, jumping from the 40,000 visitations of yore to more than 1.5 million that now tender our business tills with an estimated economic impact of over \$50 Million dollars. Among those visitations will be fourteen major tournament tour groups, among which will be the very first visit by the Women's Bassmaster Tour set for February 8-10- 2007."

"Del Rio is very excited about having the women anglers of the WBT circuit coming here with one of their national tour events, stated Donna Langford, and we are planning to receive them with a Del Rio sized welcome mat that will include public "meet the pros" sessions, televised tournament coverage, news conferences, and tournament tour sponsor banquets. This will also include daily lunch box sendoffs for the WBT anglers loaded with our famous Del Rio cuisine of peanut butter & jelly sandwiches.

"Oh, by the way, Donna Langford finalized with a Del Rio sized grin, did I mention that the Del Rio Chamber of Commerce also serves up a 'World Class' peanut butter & jelly sandwich!?"

For more info; on Del Rio and its Lake Amistad attractions contact the Del Rio Chamber of Commerce at - 1-830-775-3551.

For more info; on lodging and events contact; The Del Rio Convention & Visitors Bureau at -1-800-889-8149.

My Personal Recommendation; Polo del Rio - Ramada Inn - at - 1-830-775-1511.

General fishing Info; on Amistad - contact Debra Hengst at -1-210-241-1959.

Web-service info; contact Denese Freeman at -1-580-678-3064.

For more info; on the National Park Service Information Center for the Amistad National Recreation Area contact - 1-830-775-7491.

This Ed Snyder/Outdoors report sponsored by; The Stump Restaurant & Club - The Bass Buster Inn - The Ramada Inn Del Rio - Fishing World.com - The LFSA - The LSRPA.



Debra and Denese review their Amistad fishing map for hopeful bass holding areas

Photo by Ed Snyder



Denese Freeman (L) and Debra Hengst prepare to prefish Amistad's WBT event

Photo by Ed Snyder

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